

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 321 906

PS 018 985

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TITLE Involvement of Parents in the Nursery School Program.
Report of the Research Project.
INSTITUTION Maharaja Sayajirao Univ. of Baroda (India).
PUB DATE 88
NOTE 23p.; Poor quality type throughout, with numerous
handwritten corrections.
PUB TYPE Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Foreign Countries; *Mothers; Outcomes of Education;
Parent Education; *Parent Participation; *Preschool
Education; *Program Effectiveness; *Program
Implementation
IDENTIFIERS *India; Program Characteristics

ABSTRACT

This report describes a project of the Chetan Balwadi (a laboratory nursery school operated by the Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, India) designed to increase parent participation in the program. Objectives were to help parents: (1) develop awareness of characteristics and needs of preschoolers; (2) acquire basic skills and knowledge essential for effective assistance in core activities; and (3) apply their special skills, knowledge, and resources to benefit the children. Although about 40 parents welcomed the idea and 30 agreed to participate, fathers and working mothers found it difficult to do so. Only 14 were able to complete the program. Parent training sessions focused on characteristics of preschool children, art and music experiences, story telling, and readiness. Evaluation data indicated that mothers took the program seriously and their attendance was regular and punctual. Initiative and desire for new information on mothers' part were commendable. Mothers showed faster progress in skill-oriented areas than in highly theoretical areas. Mothers developed good skills in working with a large group of children, but were not confident when handling aggressive and difficult children. After the training, mothers were encouraged to participate in the nursery school whenever they had time. (RH)

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Report of The Research Project

INVOLVEMENT OF PARENTS IN THE NURSERY SCHOOL PROGRAM

*(Sponsored by The Post-Graduate Council of
The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda,
Baroda-390 002.
for the Year 1987-88)*

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INVOLVEMENT OF PARENTS IN THE NURSERY SCHOOL PROGRAM

INTRODUCTION

Parent and child

It is difficult to think of any other relationship that is as natural as powerful; parents remain a strong influence on children throughout their life but from birth until three years they are the single most important force in the ~~child~~ development of a child. In the first three years of child's life parents usually have all the power of decision-making and naturally, all the responsibility of the resulting consequences.

Then comes preschool. A milestone in child's life. With preschool emerges one more influential force in child development - the teacher.

For optimum development of the child the two forces—parents and teachers—have to join hands and work as partners.

Growing should be a happy experience for children. If Early Childhood Education is meaningful, challenging and exciting, it can go a long way in giving the child a happy feeling of growing. It is a sad fact that this ideal situation is not always found in reality. Extreme diversity in the approach and expectations of parents and teachers often makes preschool a traumatic experience for many children.

Parent involvement therefore becomes a crucial and integral part of a nursery school program. A well designed parent involvement program helps both, parents as well as teachers. First of all, it provides a platform for them to come closer and share insights and experiences. It can be of great help in eliminating prejudices and misconceptions. Teachers no longer remain competitors and critics ^{of parents} nor would they be regarded as paid workers who are supposed to take up all the responsibility of child's education once the child enters preschool. Similarly parents would not be looked down upon as ignorant fools who have to be

'taught' everything about child development. A good parent involvement program transforms the parent-teacher relationship from 'receiver-giver' model, to that of equal partners. Here, teachers work with parents, not for them. Parents feel a sense of belonging for the nursery school and they become initiators rather than ~~more~~ ^C observers.

Parent Involvement in Chetan Balwadi

Right from the early days of Chetan Balwadi — our laboratory nursery school — ^{the parent} program has been considered a very important component. A variety of methods like meetings, small-group discussions, home visits and news-letters are used to make the parent program effective and interesting.

The present project takes one step ahead in this direction, by stimulating active participation of parents in the daily balwadi program. A series of planned experiences prepares the parents to work with children and benefits all — children, teachers and parents themselves.

Rationale of the Present Project

The present project is designed taking into consideration multiple outcomes and influences.

First of all, increasing the number of classroom participants would facilitate ^{greater} ~~more~~ individual attention to children. There would be greater input in program planning and better scope for action research in classroom.

Participating parents can help strengthen the overall Balwadi program with their special skills, knowledge and resources.

At the same time, parents would gain additional awareness knowledge and skills useful ^{in interacting} with children. For any individual to work in ^a informal balwadi set-up, proper training is required. The present program is

designed to train parents through planned experiences which can also be meaningful at home with slight modifications.

Objectives

Broad objective

To strengthen the balwadi program by increased involvement of parents, especially in the daily classroom participation.

Specific objectives

1. To help parents develop awareness regarding characteristics and needs of preschoolers.
2. To help parents acquire basic skills and knowledge essential for them to effectively assist in core-activities of balwadi.
3. To help parents channelise their special skills, knowledge and resources to benefit balwadi children.

METHODOLOGY

The program was carried out in the following phases:

1. Sample selection, tool construction to find out details regarding the background of parents, testing and pre-testing their knowledge with the help of a questionnaire, analysing the information and accordingly planning the actual program content and tool construction for evaluation.
2. Pilot program.
3. Orientation to participants (through discussions, talk and guided observation).
4. Training sessions.
5. Evaluation.

Sample

The main criterion for sample selection was willingness of parents, and their readiness to regularly participate in the program.

Parents were gradually motivated to volunteer for the program through a variety of methods like regular parents meetings of balwadi, individual discussions and circulars.

A ~~small~~ questionnaire was prepared to find out their willingness to participate and timings convenient to them.

Tools

A questionnaire was prepared to find out the background information, hobbies, interests and talents of parents (Appendix 1). Another test was constructed to find out the knowledge content of parents.

Based on the analysis of the knowledge test the following topics were finalised for training:

1. Characteristics and needs of children (related to age and stage of development);
2. Art activities;
3. Story telling, music experiences and rhythmic; and
4. School readiness.

Pilot Program

The pilot program was conducted for a week, from March 14 to March 21, 1988. Ten parents participated. The pilot program was carried out with a view to find^{ing} out/

1. Feasibility of a program of planned experiences for parents;
2. Efficacy of the content and methods selected; and
3. Optimum time required for each topic.

The highlights and important lessons learnt from the pilot program are presented here.

1. Balwadi timings being in the morning, fathers and working mothers could not participate in the program even though they were very much interested.

2. Gain scores were found higher for sessions like story telling, music and creative aids and content appropriate and adequate. This could be due to the concrete nature of the topics and methods and material used. More abstract topics like needs and characteristics of children and school readiness did not show enough gains on test. Such theoretical subject-matter requires longer duration of instruction and repetitive reinforcement.
3. All the methods used during the program—observation, demonstration, discussion, display etc.—were found effective in fulfilling the objectives of the program. Also detailed guidelines provided for the session on general observation were found useful.
4. Parents felt that the learning experiences provided in the program helped them develop interest and confidence necessary to try out the activities at home. Parents of out-going children (K.G. class) showed willingness to participate as resource persons even after their children were no longer in the balwadi.
5. Parents found it difficult to express their ideas and gain in knowledge in writing. They preferred to share their experiences in personal interviews or informal discussion groups.

On the basis of the feedback from parents in the pilot program, it was decided to/

1. increase duration of all the sessions ^{to ensure} ~~for~~ clarity and adequate coverage, especially for ~~the~~ abstract topics like characteristics and needs of children and school readiness and include more recapitulation activities;
2. increase the duration of observation and participation in classroom and arrange follow up discussions on the same day at the end of every session; and

3. use combination of evaluation devices rather than only written questionnaire.

On the whole the pilot program was successful and set the stage for further planning.

The Program of Planned Experiences

Based on the lessons learnt from the pilot program modifications were made during planning to improve upon the adequacy of content and learning experiences and time duration for abstract topics, and classroom observation as well as participation.

Objectives and rationale of the program were constantly referred to as guiding factors.

1. Sample: The sampling procedure was almost the same as the one followed during the pilot program. Once again, willingness and possibility for regular uninterrupted participation were the main criteria and that worked as a limiting factor. Fathers and working mothers found it difficult to participate. Still a few mothers did manage to get leave from their jobs.

About 40 parents welcomed the idea and 30 of them agreed to participate but only 14 parents continued participating till the completion of the program due to sudden personal and family problems like sickness, ^{un}expected guests, etc. Thus the final sample consisted of 14 mothers.

2. Tools: Tool construction was an important task for both, planning the training sessions and evaluation at a later stage.

The questionnaire designed to get background information and details regarding ^{parents'} ~~their~~ special talents, hobbies and interests had a variety of response systems, open ended, tick-mark type and listing or fill-in-the blanks type questions were included.

The knowledge test also consisted of objective as well as subjective items on each topic.

Orientation

The first day of the training period was entirely devoted to orientation and introduction. It was planned to help parents become familiar with the balwadi set up, the objectives and plan of the program and with the group, so that they can achieve from and contribute to the program in the best possible way. It also facilitated better rapport between nursery school teachers and parents.

Introduction of mothers was done through a game in which pairs of mothers got to know each other and then introduced each other to the group. This

It was followed by a talk and discussion about the program, its objectives, content, methodology and expectations from the participants during and after the program.

A guided tour of Chetan Balwadi was arranged to familiarise mothers with the physical set-up of the balwadi, room-arrangement and facilities available.

A small exhibition displayed a variety of activity materials and their use and also explained technical terms that would be generally used in the balwadi program, e.g. manipulative toys, peg-boards, readiness activities, etc.

Training Sessions

Characteristics of preschool children

This topic included the physical-motor, emotional and social characteristics of children of three age groups - 3 to 4 years, 4 to 5 years and 5 to 6 years. Taking into consideration the abstract and theoretical nature of the topic two entire sessions were devoted to it. As the topic

was a pre-requisite for meaningful participation and classroom activity. A variety of methods and aids were used to reinforce the learning.

The session began with observation of children in classrooms by the participating mothers. Observation guidelines were developed by the research team (Appendix 2). These guidelines were explained to mothers and were thoroughly discussed to clear any doubts or difficulties. Mothers were divided into three groups according to their children's ages and were allotted classroom for observation of children of ~~the~~ class^{es} other than ^{those of} their children. They observed children in ^a classroom for 40 minutes.

After the observation, mothers got together with the teachers and shared their observations. Teachers supplemented their observations with facts, examples and their own experiences.

Art Experiences

The first session of art activities began with recapitulation of characteristics of children and linking ^{them} it to grading and choosing the art activities according to age and development. Mothers' values of art activities were also discussed.

The major art activities discussed were clay-work, cutting, sticking and collage making, printing and drawing. Each activity was discussed in detail with reference to its contribution in child's development, ~~what~~ materials and preparation ~~were~~ required for the activity, ~~what~~ modifications and special considerations ~~were~~ necessary according to child's age group and individual developmental stage, and how the activity could enhance parent-child interaction.

The next session began with a discussion of the content covered in the previous session to recapitulate the learning and clear doubts, if any.

Partial participation in the art activities was the next stage. Mothers got the opportunity to make preparation for the art activities

and it reinforced their knowledge about materials and room arrangement. Mothers were specifically guided to observe the concentration span of children of each age group.

Mothers came out with detailed and unusual observations. Drawing encouraged some children to give names to the things in the picture and narrate a story; in clay-work children creatively used sticks, shells and bottle tops and interacted freely. Age characteristics of children were also distinctly noticeable. In paper cutting ^{it was} ~~they~~ noticed that younger and older children ^{hold} the scissors in different ways and cut with varying precision. Mothers also recognised the need for appreciation in the children of the age group of 4-5 years.

Story Telling

Story telling being a skill-oriented activity, it was decided to use workshop-cum-discussion as the method.

Values of story-telling, its contribution in child's socio-emotional, cognitive and language development as well as in enhancing imagination, confidence and creativity were discussed in the beginning.

The mothers were given information about how one should select a story according to age group, what children look for in a story and what type of characteristics appeal to them.

Once the mothers were equipped with basic knowledge of various story-techniques like /

- flash cards,
- flannel board,
- puppets,
- role-play, and
- illustrated books,

they were demonstrated by the teachers and resource persons. Mothers were given tips on how to make each technique effective.

Next day, mothers were sent to classrooms for detailed observation and partial participation according to guidelines given by teachers. The session concluded with sharing of mothers' experiences and summarizing the important considerations for story telling.

Magical Experiences

The session on musical experiences covered all the four areas namely rhythmic, sound discrimination, songs and instrumental music. ~~Methods~~ ^{were the methods adopted for this session} ~~used~~ ^{work} Workshop, demonstration and discussion. Songs with puppets and rhythmic riddles were also included in the program.

A discussion on values of songs and musical experiences included their contribution in building vocabulary, memory concentration and sensitivity to sounds. Children also get new information in interesting way and can get emotional outlet through rhythm, music and songs.

Tape recorder, harmonium, khanjari etc. were used for rhythmic and instrumental music.

Content of songs was given much importance. Resource persons were invited to conduct the workshop in which they sang songs like ਭੈਰੋਂ ਦੀ ਭੈਰੋਂ and ਪੰਧਰਾ ਜਾਨੀ ਭੈਰੋਂ and mothers identified the learning experiences they offered. The mothers were encouraged to sing songs.

Readiness

School readiness was the final area in the program. Readiness shop was conducted to develop understanding regarding the concept of readiness and activities using familiar objects and material that develop school readiness.

Mothers were explained that readiness did not emphasise learning numbers and alphabets and rote memorisation of facts, ^{and} that readiness

activities should include pre-reading^{and} pre-writing exercises and should aim at cognitive development.

The focus of the workshop was on using familiar, easily available objects and material to promote various aspects of development - for examples, classification on the basis of color, size and shape, numbers and counting.

The program also made use of a number of checklists to evaluate the daily performance of mothers during classroom observation and participation and to identify problems as they occur (see Appendix 3).

Collection of Data and Findings

Data were collected by the following methods:

1. Pre-test—post-test method with the help of questionnaire ¹¹ 1- out the improvement brought about by training (Appendices 1).
2. Interviews to collect information about the retention of change brought about by training (Appendix 4).
3. On-going observation of mothers' performance (Appendix 3).

Since the number of participants was small and the questionnaire had a limited number of open ended questions, no rigorous statistical analysis was attempted. The following findings are derived by qualitative analysis of observation and mothers' remarks during interviews and their answers on the questionnaire.

FINDINGS

1. Story: Out of 14 mothers, 12 mothers were very well prepared for ~~the~~ ^{telling} story. The stories selected by eight mothers were excellent and quite age-appropriate. All mothers tried to use ~~story~~ ^{the} technique of voice modulation and gestures. ^{in story telling} There was a marked improvement in their pronunciations.

All the mothers showed satisfaction about the story session and felt that they really learnt several aspects about which they had not

thought previously. The most valued learning they felt was pre- and use of story technique. However, we observed that when it came to using the story technique most mothers were still shy and a little clumsy and had inhibitions while facing the ~~group~~ *audience*.

2. Music: Selection of song, presentation and involvement of children were three major criteria in evaluating performance of mothers.

Eleven mothers selected songs that were age appropriate, rhythmic and familiar to children. The rest of them selected songs which were appropriate and rhythmic but children were not familiar with the songs and, therefore, involvement of children was affected. Ten mothers were considerably successful in using gestures and eight of them could please children with modulation of voice according to characters in the song (birds, animals). None of the mothers tried any special technique like puppets.

Mothers were careful about sitting arrangement of children and were in general much more confident in the music session compared to telling. Their sense of rhythm was commendable and also their efforts in involving children in singing and action.

Activities: All the mothers had gained awareness regarding the range of activities that could be enjoyed by children and also the material required. Their performance in organising activity sessions for children was satisfactory. The sitting arrangement was good ^{and} material appropriate, and some mothers also showed initiative in developing new activities. One major fault which was observed in as many as five mothers was ^{that of} giving too many instructions to children and not letting them work independently. This flaw, however, was avoided in the consecutive sessions. Finer aspects like display of materials, indirect guidance, encouraging interaction among children etc. were found difficult to implement though mothers showed theoretical awareness.

Needs and Characteristics of Children

Mothers realised the importance of the knowledge regarding the needs and characteristics of children but the actual gain in information was very low. The demarcation between the three age groups among pre-schoolers was not easy to establish for mothers. They experienced still greater difficulty relating the characteristics of children with their needs and activities. Such training sessions can not adequately deal with subject-matters that need years of close contact with large number of children.

Major Observations

1. Mothers took the program very seriously and their attendance was regular and punctual.
2. Initiative and desire for new information on mothers' part was commendable. They made a very interactive and sharing group that contributed a great deal in making the experience meaningful.
3. Mothers showed faster progress in skill-oriented areas rather than highly theoretical ones.
4. Mothers develop^{ed} good skills in working with a large group of children but they were not confident while handling aggressive and difficult children.
5. After the training program mothers were encouraged to participate in ^{the} balwadi whenever they had time. This was voluntary but at least eight mothers participated twice every week for a couple of months. Later when a balwadi teacher was on leave some mothers offered to substitute even^t though their children were ^{then} ~~not~~ in the balwadi.

A valedictory function was held at the completion of the program. Participating mothers were given certificates and a set of hand-outs

on some topics included in the program (Appendix 5). The mothers were also given a set of publications of the Balwadi (viz. song book and activities for school readiness).

CONCLUSION

Such programs for balwadi parents should be a regular feature in balwadis every year.

APPENDIX 1

PARENT INVOLVEMENT PROGRAM

Questionnaire for parents before the programObjectives of the questionnaire

1. To gain information on the background of the participant mothers.
2. To know their interests and hobbies.
3. To gain information about their knowledge and understanding about the growth and development of young children and their role as parents.

1. Background Information

Sr. No.	Name of persons in family	Age in years	Educational qualification	Occupation	Income per month	Relationship with the child
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-
2. Most suitable time for participating in the program for parents.

Please tick (☐) the most suitable one.

- a. 8.00 a.m. to 11.00 a.m.
- b. 11.00 a.m. to 2.00 p.m.
- c. 2.00 p.m. to 5.00 p.m.

3. a. Which hobbies do you pursue during your leisure time?
- b. Mention any skill that you possess e.g. good in music or rangoli, or any other.
- c. In relation to the above, have you attended any/

- i. Classes ? : Yes / No
- ii. Workshops ? : Yes / No
- iii. Programs ? : Yes / No

- d. If yes, where did you attend these and what was the duration?

4. What do you expect to gain from this program?
5. What do you keep in mind in order to promote good health and growth of your children?

6. In your opinion, how can we promote the mental development of a child in the early years of life?
7. What is the importance and value of the below mentioned things in the development of a child?
 - a. Books:
 - b. Toys:
 - c. Places for outings:
8. What do you do when your child exhibits the following behaviours?
 - a. Destructiveness:
 - b. Stubbornness:
 - c. Inactivity:
 - d. Hyperactivity:
9. At what age do you think children should begin formal learning?
10. Do you think it will be possible for you to assist the teacher in the balwadi if and when it is required?
- 1 Yes / No
11. If yes, (a) how many hours during the day can you offer us your help? Please mention the timings.
12. Also mention how many days per week. Please mention the days too.

APPENDIX 2

GUIDELINES FOR OBSERVATION OF CHILDREN

I. Outdoor Free-Play

1. The children play alone most of the time.
2. The children play with one or two children.
3. The children play in a group of 4 to 5.
4. The children play in a small gang (6 or more children).
5. The children need presence of an adult most of the time.
6. The children need an occasional presence of adults (e.g. fight with peers, taking turns, etc.).
7. The children rarely approach an adult for problem solving.
8. Most of the children are engrossed in semivigorous or quiet play activities most of the time (e.g. sand pit, swings, wooden slides, jumping, walking on planks' obstacles etc.).
9. Most of the children are engrossed in vigorous activities most of the time (e.g. merry-go-round, jungle gym, large slides, tyres, jumping from heights, running and catching, etc.).

II. Indoor Free-play

1. The children sit for one activity for a few minutes only (go to another activity).
2. The children shift to another activity after completing the first one.
3. Most children need to be instructed individually for new ~~art~~ activity.
4. Most children need repetition ^{of} instructions in a group before any new art activity.
5. Most children follow the given instruction for art activities in a group and perform it.
6. Most children can use ~~scissors~~ ^{scissors} effectively.
7. Most children can cut along simple shapes.
8. Most children can cut along complicated shapes.
9. Most children scribble on paper with crayons using large strokes.
10. Most children draw some shapes/designs as it appears to them.

11. Most children draw shapes/designs and name them.
12. Most children explore the environment and manipulate the objects and materials.
13. Most children ask verbal questions related to the materials and object in the environment.

APPENDIX 3

Story Telling and Songs

Know stories/songs	Whether uses techniques	Selection of story appropriate to age group	Gestures, Expression	Voice modulation tone	Whether the narration is monotonic	Pronunciation	Sitting arrangement of children	Involve-ment of children	Personal/characteristics of the narrator
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Art Activities

Knowledge of activity materials	Preparation in advance	Lay out of materials	Sitting arrangement	Whether provides models	<u>Instruction/Guidance</u>			Whether communicates with children	Winding up - whether involves children
					Good	Fair	Poor		

APPENDIX 4

EVALUATION CHECKLISTS (To be marked by parents)

I. Art Activities

Do you provide the following activities to your child/children?

Paper cutting

Clay work

Drawing/painting using crayons, pencils or chalks

Painting

Creative activities using waste materials (name materials you use)/

II. Music

1. Do you sing?

2. Do you play cassettes of children's songs?

3. Do you encourage your child to ^{dance} ~~devise~~ to the tune and rhythm of songs?

4. Do you practice gestures and modulation of voice while you sing?

5. Do you learn songs by heart or sing with the help of a song book?

III. Story Telling

1. Do you tell stories to your child? Everyday?

2. Do you know the stories by heart or have you to read them to the child from books?

3. Which type of themes do your stories have?

- animals and birds

- fairies

- historical events and personalities

- adventure

- nature study

4. Do you write stories or inovate them during story sessions?

5. Do you encourage active involvement of the listening children during the story sessions?

6. Do you buy your children story books?